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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2019
TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [MOPS](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY ANTI-CRIME PLAN A GAMBLE FOR FUNES
(C-AL9-02261)

REF: A. DAO IIR 6 829 0022 10 (DTG 052222Z NOV 09)
[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 1019

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On November 5, President Funes signed an emergency decree to deploy 3,500 soldiers into 28 urban areas to combat a growing wave of violent crime. Politicians, the military and the public strongly support the plan, but critics fear human rights violations and damage to the Salvadoran Armed Forces' (ESAF) and the National Civilian Police's (PNC) reputations. If Funes does not simultaneously strengthen the PNC during the decree's 180 day window, any positive results will not persist and renewed public outcry could push Funes once again to seek a military solution to the public security problem. End Summary.

THE PLAN: 3,500 TROOPS FOR 180 DAYS

[1](#)2. (S/NF) President Funes's emergency decree supplements the 1,700 to 2,000 soldiers who currently conduct joint patrols with PNC officers with an additional 3,500 troops to occupy and control 28 of the most violent urban areas within the five highest-crime departments in the country (La Libertad, San Miguel, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Sonsonate). The troops will deploy for 180 days beginning November 6. According to DAO reporting, in contrast to the PNC-led joint patrols, this new plan grants the ESAF tactical control over the troops; a small number of PNC officers will accompany the troops to conduct arrests in cases where the military is prohibited from detaining a suspect (ref A).

THE RATIONALE: A CHEAP, POPULAR SOLUTION

[1](#)4. (C) The move comes in response to a 37 percent rise in homicides thus far in 2009 and declining public trust in the PNC's ability to control public security (reftel B). An October poll by the left-leaning University of Central America's Institute for Public Opinion revealed just 40 percent of respondents feel the PNC can protect them, and 46 percent believe the PNC itself is involved in criminal activities. Given the perceived urgency of the problem and the government's tight finances, Funes needed a quick, cheap way to fight crime without involving the underfunded, outgunned, and understaffed PNC. He emphasized in a November 3 speech that the ESAF law enforcement plan would not require any additional funding nor legal reforms other than a constitutionally-mandated report to the Legislative Assembly once the 180-day deployment ends.

[1](#)5. (S/NF) The public and politicians alike strongly support Funes's strategy. A poll published on November 3 by the (conservative) El Diario de Hoy newspaper revealed that 94 percent of San Salvador urban residents support increasing

the number of troops engaged in law enforcement activities. Political parties of all ideological stripes - from the left-wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) to the conservative National Republican Alliance (ARENA) - support the Funes plan. Ref A suggests that while the military officer corps is wary of increasing ESAF involvement in law enforcement, they consider it necessary because they do not believe the PNC has the commitment or ability to resolve the current crime epidemic.

THE RISKS: HR VIOLATIONS AND DAMAGE TO ESAF/PNC

¶16. (S/NF) Despite widespread public approval, minority elements on both the left and right have criticized the plan.

From the left, Benjamin Cuellar, director of the Central American University's Human Rights Institute (IDHUCA), told PolOff that the new strategy may lead to human rights violations which would bring unwanted negative attention to the Funes government. From the right, despite their party's support for the policy, several ARENA members told PolOff they fear this may be the first step in a long-term strategy by the FMLN to gain territorial control of the country using military force, as Chavez did in Venezuela. Several critics of the policy, including the left-leaning Cuellar and conservative ARENA mayor Milagro Navas, told us they believe the military lacks the training and experience necessary for effective law enforcement.

¶17. (S/NF) DAO reporting (Ref A) suggests the military is concerned that the plan may damage the ESAF's hard-earned institutional prestige if they do not meet security targets.

They also worry that the increased law enforcement role will expose soldiers to the corrosive influences that have corrupted elements of the PNC. Finally, they fear the plan, which utilizes more than half of the military's total forces, may overburden ESAF resources without providing additional funding, thereby diminishing the military's national defense capabilities.

¶18. (C) The plan may also harm the PNC. Recent headlines about PNC officers involved in organized crime and surveys that show trust in the PNC at low ebb have likely taken a toll on the institution's morale. Contacts suggest high-ranking PNC officials oppose Funes's plan, which they believe threatens the PNC's authority. Funes has yet to announce a plan to strengthen the PNC concurrent with this ESAF operation.

COMMENT: WILL THIS BECOME A LONG-TERM DEPLOYMENT?

¶19. (C) Comment: This plan is designed as a stop-gap measure, but the government has not yet articulated how it will use the next 180 days to strengthen the PNC in order to make the gains generated by this plan sustainable. Given the government's tight finances and the short six-month period it has to act, we doubt the Funes administration can make sufficient improvements to the PNC to allow for a smooth transition once the deployment ends. We suspect that public opinion may force Funes to keep the ESAF in the streets far longer than 180 days to buy more time.

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